

News release: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

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Province must get serious about tracking industrial water use and ensure that major consumers pay their fair share, new report finds

VANCOUVER – The BC government has a poor handle on how much water major industries are using, even though those industries are expanding and climate change is altering stream and river flows, a new report concludes.

Released today by the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the study recommends that the provincial government build on its commitments to improve environmental management by granting one provincial authority sole responsibility for collecting data on all water use in the province.

“BC’s water resources face numerous challenges, from climate change to population growth, to potentially explosive growth in polluting industries, including the mining and liquefied natural gas sectors,” says report author Ben Parfitt, a research associate with POLIS and resource policy analyst with the CCPA. “Now more than ever, we need the province to commit to a Water Sustainability Act that embraces the need for transparent, across-the-board reporting of all water use.”

The report finds that in some cases the province does not even require major industries to meter their withdrawals from lakes, rivers and streams. In the pulp and paper industry, for example, only one mill is required to have meters installed. There is also a complete lack of regulation on sub-surface or groundwater withdrawals.

The report also finds evidence that the province is foregoing sizeable revenues by undercharging companies for the water they use. In the natural gas industry, where large amounts of water are used in hydraulic fracturing (or “fracking”) operations, the province receives just \$2.75 per Olympic swimming pool withdrawn from lakes, rivers and streams. Yet the community of Dawson Creek is charging some of the same companies \$11,000 for the equivalent volume of water.

The report recommends a new model for the provincial government to track industrial water use, including:

- Designate one BC agency sole responsibility for gathering and publicly reporting all water use data, and have an independent auditor periodically verify the agency’s performance.
- Require that all major water users meter the water they consume and report that data to the provincial agency responsible for water use data collection.
- Increase water use fees and use a portion of the revenues collected to pay for a BC-wide water use database and increased environmental monitoring and enforcement efforts.

For more information or to arrange interviews with Ben Parfitt, contact Sarah Leavitt: 604-801-5121 x233 or sarah@policyalternatives.ca

Counting Every Drop: The Case for Water Use Reporting in BC is available at policyalternatives.ca/counting-every-drop. The paper is co-published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' BC Office and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria, with funding from the Vancouver Foundation and others (for full list see paper).